

# A Professional Code of Ethics and Progress Report

## One University's Approach to Addressing Disruptive Behaviors in the Classroom

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*Professors, like elementary school teachers, must deal with their share  
of childish behavior or see their teaching undermined.*

**D**isruptive behaviors by students in the college classroom have become a growing concern among educators in all disciplines (Bru, Stephens, & Torshheim, 2002; Wayda & Lund, 2005; Wilson, 2005). These disruptive behaviors include arriving late to class or leaving early, talking with peers during lectures, verbally expressing dissatisfaction over assignments or grades, making sarcastic comments, leaving exams noisily (Boice, 1996; Mishra, 1992), sleeping during lectures (Kilmer, 1998), exhibiting academic dishonesty (LaBeff, Clark, Haines, & Diekhoff, 1990), reading the newspaper in class (Heinemann, 1996; Herr, 1989), asking questions that are irrelevant, exhibiting bad manners (Heinemann, 1996), and text-messaging friends with cell phones. These behaviors must be addressed and modified if effective learning is to take place and if physical education teacher education (PETE) candidates are to become effective educators.

Accountability and responsibility have become key topics in the educational arena (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004). Consequently, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has developed and implemented standards as a form of accountability, to ensure that teacher candidates acquire and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective PreK-12 educators (NCATE, 2002). The first NCATE standard addresses candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Physical education teacher education students are expected to behave in a professional and ethical manner when teaching students, or interacting and communicating with colleagues and the community. Unfortunately, PETE students do not always demonstrate those desirable behaviors in the college classroom.

The purpose of this article is to examine disruptive behaviors in the college classroom; offer strategies that will help diminish the occurrence of disruptive behaviors; explore the role of a conceptual framework and professional code of ethics; and promote professional behaviors by PETE students in educator licensure programs through the use of professional progress reports.

## The Origins of Disruptive Behaviors

Examining the origins of disruptive behaviors is the critical first step to developing an effective plan of action. Educators in colleges and universities must understand these behaviors and the types of students who will be coming to their classrooms. They must also find ways to partner with their colleagues in elementary and secondary schools to promote smooth transitions from one level to the next. Elementary school educators often complain that their students come ill-prepared to learn and that much of their time is spent addressing social issues rather than educational issues. These social issues range from the extreme of abuse, neglect, and homelessness, to working parents who are too tired or unavailable to prepare nutritious meals, assist with homework, or resolve sibling conflicts. At the secondary school level, this leads to poor performance in school, loss of self-esteem, acting out, and skipping classes. At the college level, these issues lead to a lack of preparation for college academics, inadequate reading and writing skills, mental health problems, lack of direction, lack of awareness of how to behave in the classroom (Kilmer, 1998), and not feeling challenged. Behaviors also may be a function of maturity, lack of attention, or lack of socialization (Mishra, 1992).

Further, students may not take ownership of these behaviors or fully understand their seriousness. For example, when addressing the issue of academic dishonesty, students often rationalize their behavior. They admit that cheating is wrong for everyone else, but justify their own cheating in various ways (LaBeff et al., 1990). Students sometimes deny their responsibility when it comes to cheating, blame the incident on the perceived unfairness of the teacher, or rationalize it as acceptable in order to assist a peer (LaBeff et al., 1990).

Violence, sexual assault, harassment, bullying, and indifference to learning are the most disturbing behaviors that must be addressed (Boice, 1996; Bru et al., 2002). Due to the magnitude of these problems, teacher training in these areas have been implemented and made mandatory in many public schools across the United States (Boice, 1996). Educators are adapting and implementing new management strategies to attend to behaviors that they may not have had to address in the past. It is hoped that if educators understand the catalysts behind the deviant behaviors, they can begin to make the appropriate and targeted changes in an effort to create more positive and conducive learning environments.

## Strategies for Dealing with Disruptive Behaviors

Most experienced educators have developed effective methods for dealing with disruptive behaviors in the classroom and should share them with their less experienced colleagues who may also face these problems (Boice, 1996). It is critical to first take the time to understand and identify the reasons behind the behaviors (Kilmer, 1998; Kuhlenschmidt & Layne, 1999). Discussing behavior problems one-on-one with the student outside of class is a recommended technique for good

teaching (Herr, 1989; Kilmer, 1998; Mishra, 1992). Reasons behind the behavior will vary from student to student and can include physical, emotional, or environmental factors (Kilmer, 1998; Kuhlenschmidt & Layne, 1999). For example, if a student is sleeping or nodding off, it might be due to medications, substance abuse, fatigue, or personal loss (e.g. the death of a loved one; Kilmer, 1998; Kuhlenschmidt & Layne, 1999, Mishra, 1992). The escalation of the behavior could be alleviated or prevented if time is taken to understand the root cause early on. Once the cause is identified, appropriate solutions can be generated between student and professor.

Good teaching practices can help to alleviate disruptive behaviors in the classroom. These include the establishment of class rules and expectations for students at the beginning of the semester by outlining the policies and procedures in a syllabus and clearly discussing the possible ramifications with the class (Herr, 1989; Links, 1990; Mishra, 1992). Instructors need to teach appropriate and responsible behaviors to students throughout the program of learning by following consistent guidelines from course to course and by setting high expectations and standards in the college classroom (Links, 1990).

Students need to understand that there are consequences to the decisions they make. Varying instructional strategies may capture and maintain students' attention and engage them in active learning (Herr, 1989; Links, 1990). Creative seating is recommended to distribute disruptive students (Herr, 1989). It might involve separating students who appear to influence each other or who display unacceptable behaviors. However, instructors should avoid spreading out students significantly throughout the classroom because this could detract from the instructor's rapport. Establishing a rapport to create a comfortable, conducive atmosphere that enhances the learning and teaching environment is critical (Herr, 1989). Students need to feel comfortable and not threatened if they are to become active and engaged learners.

Immediate feedback on homework (Links, 1990) and the use of multiple exams to alleviate the occurrence of cheating (Herr, 1989) are also recommended as good teaching practices. When students do not perform according to course expectations, clear and concise feedback is recommended to decrease frustration (Links, 1990). If teachers demonstrate class control when putting these suggested strategies into practice, students will learn to be more in control of their own behaviors and feelings (Mishra, 1992; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1984).

## Teaching Standards of Behavior to PETE Students

Colleges and universities can play a crucial role in character development and can assist students to interpret their worlds and understand how their reactions can affect others (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Shulman, 2003). Students learn standards of behavior through daily interactions with professors. Colby et al. stated that undergraduate education

Table 1. UCO Professional Code of Ethics for Teacher Candidates

Commitment to Students	Commitment to the Profession	Commitment to the Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support learning</li> <li>• Provide varying view points</li> <li>• Present material openly and accurately</li> <li>• Provide a safe and healthy learning environment</li> <li>• Create comfortable learning environments</li> <li>• Promote, reward, and provide opportunity for diversity</li> <li>• Refrain from imposing personal beliefs</li> <li>• Avoid relationships for private advantage</li> <li>• Maintain privacy and confidentiality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adhere to UCO Professional Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Accurately report competency and qualifications</li> <li>• Maintain appropriate confidentiality regarding field experience and course work</li> <li>• Avoid slanderous statements</li> <li>• Refrain from accepting gifts that would influence decisions</li> <li>• Refrain from assisting unqualified persons for program admittance</li> <li>• Support diversity, lifelong learning, and professionalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand cultural factors that affect learning</li> <li>• Promote positive relationships to improve public schools</li> <li>• Promote community support</li> <li>• Serve the community and the profession</li> <li>• Use resources effectively</li> <li>• Evaluate and modify actions and their consequences</li> <li>• Maintain respect and dignity</li> <li>• Maintain positive public relationships</li> <li>• Demonstrate a positive attitude toward groups</li> </ul>

Source: UCO (n.d.b)

should include “the competence to act in the world and the judgment to do so wisely” (p. 7). Competence “must include the abilities to exercise considered judgment, appreciate ends as well as means, and understand the broad implication and consequences of one’s actions and choices” (Colby et al., p. 7). Given the current problems in society, it is an ideal time to reexamine the role that undergraduate institutions play in teaching students to become morally responsible and civically engaged adults. Experiences in college influence how individuals react to similar experiences outside of college (Colby et al.).

### The Role of a Conceptual Framework

As an avenue for teaching students to become morally responsible and civically minded citizens (Colby et al., 2003), many colleges of education are guided by a conceptual framework that serve as a model for professional conduct. The University of Central Oklahoma College of Education and Professional Studies (UCO) Teacher Preparation Program is guided by such a conceptual framework (UCO, 2006). The premise behind the framework is to “prepare outstanding professionals who are reflective, responsive, and resourceful throughout their professional careers.” Teacher candidates across all disciplines are introduced to the framework during an introductory Foundations of Education class that they take either in the second semester of their sophomore year, or the first semester of their junior year. The Foundations

of Education class is the first course in the professional preparation sequence. Each element of the Conceptual Framework (reflection, responsiveness, and resourcefulness) is defined by a number of indicators used for the assessment of teacher candidates.

The reflective element is defined as the students’ ability to “analyze, evaluate, contemplate, and integrate knowledge, dispositions, and practice.” Within the process of reflection, teacher candidates learn to think critically and grow as professionals. Competencies assessed for the reflective element include the ability of teacher candidates to analyze and self-assess teaching, to demonstrate sound pedagogical knowledge, to implement modifications, and to demonstrate awareness of legal issues that affect pedagogical practices.

The responsive element is defined as “an understanding of, a sensitivity toward, and a respect for the uniqueness of a human being.” Within the process of responsiveness, teacher candidates demonstrate the ability to “be responsive to the needs of the whole student.” Competencies assessed for the responsive element include demonstrating knowledge of developmental differences among students and planning to accommodate for the differences in ability levels; seeking opportunities for professional development to improve; addressing the whole student and promoting diversity; and communicating and demonstrating community outreach to promote and represent the profession.

The resourceful element is defined as “the ability and will-

ingness to investigate, research, create, and solve problems.” Within the process of resourcefulness, teacher candidates “create meaningful activities and environments and modify those as needed.” Competencies assessed for the resourceful element include using various instructional strategies to promote critical thinking and problem solving, active learning, and group work; demonstrating instructional alignment with state standards; developing appropriate authentic assessments to monitor student learning; and implementing technology into teaching practices.

### **A Professional Code of Ethics**

A Professional Code of Ethics for Teacher Candidates (table 1) was developed from the Conceptual Framework. The code of ethics is used to introduce teacher candidates to accepted professional conduct, and they are asked to sign it during their Foundations for Education course. By signing the code, teacher candidates “demonstrate their commitment to become effective educators and contributing professionals in the global community” (UCO, n.d.b).

Teacher candidates are expected to demonstrate commitment to students, commitment to the profession, and commitment to the community. In order for teacher candidates to show commitment to students, they “must strive to help each student realize his or her potential as a worthy and effective member of society.” To show their commitment to the profession, teacher candidates must “maintain the dignity of the profession by respecting and obeying the law, demonstrating personal integrity, and exemplifying honesty.” For teacher candidates to show commitment to the community, they are expected to fulfill citizenship responsibilities by conducting themselves as “productive members of the university, local, national, and global communities. Their actions should demonstrate respect for all accordingly.” By following the Professional Code of Ethics, students are able to demonstrate acceptable, professional behaviors.

### **Assessing Student Behaviors through Professional Progress Reports**

In addition to conceptual frameworks and codes of ethics, universities have taken more aggressive steps to hold students accountable and to assess students on professional behaviors in the classroom through professional progress reports and/or rubrics (Wayda & Lund, 2005; Wilson, 2005). The University of Central Oklahoma College of Education and Professional Studies developed a Professional Progress Report (UCO, 2003) for all students in teacher education as a tool to address professional behaviors (figure 1). The report is used both to recognize exemplary behaviors and/or to report behaviors of concern. The Professional Progress Report is based on a model from Idaho State University and has been modified to reflect the University of Central Oklahoma’s Conceptual Framework. The report was approved in 2003 and implemented for the first time in the spring of 2004.

The Professional Progress Report is divided into the three elements of the Conceptual Framework previously discussed:

reflection, responsiveness, and resourcefulness. Each element contains indicators on which students are assessed. Within the element of reflection, the indicators are attendance, punctuality, self-assessment, and legal or ethical knowledge. Within the element of responsiveness, the indicators are oral communication, written communication, respect for diversity, and collegiality. Within the element of resourcefulness, the indicators are critical thinking, resourcefulness, response to feedback/supervision, and commitment to the teaching profession. An additional section identifies specific behaviors and dispositions and makes recommendations about how to address them.

The Professional Progress Report is used throughout a candidate’s course of study and is completed by faculty members in teacher education when needed. A series of progressive steps is used to complete the report (UCO, n.d.a). Initially, concerns and goals are discussed with the candidate, and the report is completed by the faculty member. Following this, the report is submitted to the chair of the Council on Teacher Education, a governance committee that monitors, assesses, and addresses candidates’ progress throughout the educator licensure program. The committee ensures that candidates meet program and state admission requirements before they are admitted to teacher education and student teaching. If two reports addressing concerns or achievements have been submitted for a student, those concerns or achievements are evaluated at the next scheduled meeting of the council. At that time, the Admissions Committee determines whether they must implement a plan of action or whether the candidate should receive recognition. A letter is then sent to the candidate and becomes a part of his or her file. If a candidate is unable to improve on behaviors of concerns, he or she may be denied admission to teacher education and student teaching.

The University of Central Oklahoma Professional Progress Report has been successfully used to assist in changing student behaviors deemed inappropriate or unprofessional and to screen out unsuitable candidates from teacher education and student teaching. For example, the report was used in the spring of 2005 for two students applying for admission to student teaching. Throughout their course of study, each of these students had several of the following unacceptable behaviors in various classes: disrespecting professors, disrupting classes with sarcastic comments, leaving classes abruptly when dissatisfied with grades, engaging in academic dishonesty, and losing control. The behaviors were first addressed individually with each student by the professor. When the behaviors continued, a progress report was submitted for each student to the chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Health Studies. The report was then discussed between the chair, the professor, and each student and filed with the Council on Teacher Education.

The students each appeared before the council to explain their behaviors. In these two situations, the council decided to deny each student admission to student teaching and teacher education. In the first situation, the student also had

Figure 1. Professional Progress Report

Candidate's Name \_\_\_\_\_ ID \* \_\_\_\_\_

Person completing the report \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: Recognize exemplary achievement \_\_\_\_\_ Report Concern \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete (check) only those items that apply. If reporting concerns, please be sure to complete page 2 and note the date the concern was discussed or addressed with the candidate in the comments section.

## REFLECTIVE

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### Attendance

- ☐ Perfect attendance record
- ☐ Rarely absent
- ☐ Frequently absent (number of times \_\_\_\_\_ )

### Self-Assessment

- ☐ Takes responsibility for successes and mistakes; seeks to remedy errors
- ☐ Takes responsibility for successes and mistakes but fails to take steps to remedy errors
- ☐ Fails to take responsibility for successes and mistakes; blames others for outcomes

### Punctuality

- ☐ Always on time
- ☐ Generally punctual
- ☐ Frequently late (number of times \_\_\_\_\_ )

### Legal and Ethical Knowledge

- ☐ Maintains the highest standards in legal and ethical behaviors; follows UCO Code of Ethics
- ☐ Shows an awareness of legal and ethical behaviors but does not consistently apply it
- ☐ Violates professional standards for legal and ethical behaviors

## RESPONSIVE

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### Oral Communication

- ☐ Articulate, expresses ideas so that others understand
- ☐ Inarticulate, hesitates to express self
- ☐ Makes frequent speaking errors

### Respect for Diversity

- ☐ Interacts with diverse individuals in respectful ways
- ☐ Indicates an awareness of individual needs, but fails to respond appropriately
- ☐ Demonstrates insensitivity toward individuals or groups of individuals

### Written Communication

- ☐ Organizes and clearly expresses ideas in writing
- ☐ Written work is often unclear and disorganized
- ☐ Written work demonstrates frequent grammatical errors

### Collegiality

- ☐ Works cooperatively
- ☐ Reluctant to cooperate and work with others
- ☐ Fails to cooperate and work with others

*Continues on page 54*



Figure 1 continued

## RESOURCEFUL

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### Critical Thinking

- ☐ Thinks critically; perceives multiple sides of an issue; develops creative responses
- ☐ Reasons through problems but is unable to see multiple sides of an issue
- ☐ Struggles with initial analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information

### Response to Feedback/Supervision

- ☐ Receptive and adjusts performance appropriately
- ☐ Receptive but fails to implement suggestions
- ☐ Defensive, unreceptive to feedback and supervision

### Resourcefulness

- ☐ Creative; independently implements plans
- ☐ Has good ideas; works effectively with limited supervision
- ☐ Passive; depends on others for direction, ideas, and guidance

### Commitment to Teaching Profession

- ☐ Appears deeply committed to the profession
- ☐ Expresses a sincere interest in teaching and students
- ☐ Expresses disdain for the teaching profession

## OTHER CONCERNS

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- ☐ Please explain any other concerns on side 2

Please complete and sign side 2

Please identify any other behaviors and/or dispositions that have interfered with this candidate's successful progress.

Identify actions or recommendations that you have already taken or made with this candidate. (Include dates)

What action(s) do you recommend to the Admissions Committee for this candidate?

Additional Comments:

Signature of individual completing the form

Please return this form to

Council on Teacher Education Admissions Committee

c/o Associate Dean

College of Education

ED 213, Box 106

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Date of Review \_\_\_\_\_

Recommended action \_\_\_\_\_

Date letter sent to candidate \_\_\_\_\_

Response received from candidate \_\_\_\_\_

Source: UCO (2003)

a low grade-point average and did not meet the admission requirements for teacher education or student teaching. That student opted for an alternative certification, left the program, and graduated. In the second situation, the student was asked to attend counseling to address anger issues. This student attended all sessions and made dramatic improvements. The student reapplied for admission, was accepted, and graduated.

Since the implementation of the report in the spring of 2004, it has been used only in these two instances. Not only did it prove to be an effective tool to deal with two very difficult situations, but it had the additional benefit of making all students aware that faculty would continue to use it if needed. While periodic concerns arise with candidates, and the potential of a progress report is discussed with the individual, problems have not persisted to a point where the progress report has been used again.

Because it is the responsibility of educator licensure programs to ensure that teacher candidates are behaving appropriately before they are placed in the schools, this tool can be a valuable asset in holding students accountable for their actions and behaviors. It is a learning process in which students are given the opportunities to change and improve upon their disruptive or unprofessional behaviors.

## Conclusion

The occurrence of behaviors that are viewed as disruptive to the educational process has increased in college classrooms across all disciplines as a result of changes in societal values, norms, and ethics. This article discussed effective teaching strategies to respond to disruptive student behaviors within educator licensure programs. Many universities have adopted measures to assess students' behaviors and attempt to correct those deemed inappropriate. This article also described one university's use of a professional progress report. These strategies can help achieve the goal of educator licensure programs of creating leaders within the field of teaching that inspire those they teach. Every student has the potential to be successful and to become a leader in his or her chosen field. In the discipline of education, leadership can be nurtured by interacting with students and colleagues. How instructors teach and supervise students and how they mentor them to interact within the community is also critical. These interactions affect professionalism and the perceptions created. It is the responsibility of educators to teach students how to interact professionally within the community and for educators to model professional behaviors as well.

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